

November 23, 2009

Rep. Obey Warns President Obama He Will Ask Taxpayers to Pay for War, Should More Troops Be Sent

By JONATHAN KARL

WASHINGTON -- The powerful chairman of the House Appropriations Committee has a stark message for President Obama about Afghanistan -- sending more troops would be a mistake that could "wipe out every initiative we have to rebuild our own economy."

[Watch online video here](#)

"There ain't going to be no money for nothing if we pour it all into Afghanistan," House Appropriations Chairman David Obey told ABC News in an exclusive interview. "If they ask for an increased troop commitment in Afghanistan, I am going to ask them to pay for it."

Obey, a Democrat from Wisconsin, made it clear that he is absolutely opposed to sending any more U.S. troops to Afghanistan and says if Obama decides to do that, he'll demand a new tax -- what he calls a "war surtax" -- to pay for it.

"On the merits, I think it is a mistake to deepen our involvement," Obey said. "But if we are going to do that, then at least we ought to pay for it. Because if we don't, if we don't pay for it, the cost of the Afghan war will wipe out every initiative we have to rebuild our own economy."

Obey's opposition to funding a troop increase in Afghanistan without a new tax would pose a significant problem for Obama if he decides to send more troops (a decision the White House says the President could make as early as November 30).

As Appropriations Committee chairman, Obey was a key player in securing money for the war when the last war funding bill narrowly passed the House in June.

His demand for a new war tax echoes a similar call by Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin, also a Democrat, who recently told Bloomberg's Al Hunt that he favors a new tax on Americans earning more than \$200,000 a year to pay for sending any additional troops.

Obey argued that the tax should be paid by all taxpayers, with rates ranging from 1 percent for lower wage earners to 5 percent for the wealthy.

The White House won't be able to count on Obey's support the next time the president seeks funding for the war.

"I want the president and every American to think ahead of time about what it means if you do add to our involvement in Afghanistan," Obey told ABC News. "I am no military strategist, but I don't believe we have the tools to accomplish our mission in Afghanistan because you have to have functioning, effective government and there isn't one in Afghanistan. There isn't one in Pakistan either."

High War Costs Will Doom Obama's Domestic Initiatives, Obey Says

Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, has requested an additional 40,000 troops. According to Obey, that would bring the cost of the war up to approximately \$90 billion a year, or \$900 billion over 10 years -- virtually the same as the cost of the Democratic health care plan.

Such a high war cost, he warns, will make it impossible to pay for any of Obama's major domestic initiatives.

"That's what happened with the Vietnam War, which wiped out [President Lyndon Johnson's social program] the Great Society," Obey said. "That's what happened with the Korean War, which wiped out Harry Truman's Square Deal. That's what happened with the end of the progressive movement before the '20s when we went into World War I. In each case, the cost of those wars shut off our ability to pay for anything else."

Copyright © 2009 ABC News Internet Ventures